

Minutes of the Town Meeting Coordinating Committee Meeting 2/25/08

- 1. Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 5:05pm. Present were Otto Stein, Peggy Roberts, Judy Simpson, Stephanie O’Keeffe, Harry Brooks and Carol Gray. Phil Jackson was absent.
- 2. Website Update:** According to Kris, the TMCC page on the Town Website will be up soon.
- 3. Minutes:**

Carol requested that either someone cover minutes for the next two meetings or that she be allowed to submit the minutes after returning from her trip abroad. The sense of the group was that it would be permissible to submit the minutes when she returns in later March.

4. Processing of suggestions listed on memo from Suggestion Subcommittee:

(See attached Recommendations of the TMCC Subcommittee Dealing with Suggestions 2/08.)

Re: Missing Town Meetings (suggestion 37): The proposal was that we do nothing about people missing meetings. We could do a memo telling people it is a myth that attendance is poor. Harry collects this information and could put together a summary of his findings. He said the bottom line was that attendance averaged about 70%.

Carol moved and Harry seconded that we educate Town Meeting members about the reality of what attendance is and publicize these results. Also, Town Meeting members should be reminded to notify the Town Clerk if they move out of Amherst. The vote was unanimous to do this.

Judy asked what we were going to do with our decisions about suggestions. Carol said we talked about doing a memo summarizing what our conclusions are on these suggestions. The sense of the group was that this was the best way to handle suggestions. Judy recommended that we have a time on the Town Meeting agenda to give a report for TMCC. (See next motion.)

Suggestions 39-41: Carol moved and Stephanie seconded a motion that TMCC:

- 1) adopt the proposals in points 1-3 under the Education heading, p. 2 (with the change that the new member orientation on the third suggestion would be right before the Warrant Review, not the Town Meeting);
- 2) ask that TMCC present a report at TM like other committees;
- 3) have a questionnaire the first night with TMCC people at the door to collect;
- 4) that we continue the practice of calling all new TM members to alert them about upcoming events and that we publicize this practice in the suggestion memo that we’ll be doing. The vote was unanimous in favor of this motion.

Suggestion 42 and 48 (p. 2 bottom and p. 3 bottom respectively): Carol moved, Judy seconded, that we ask that board recommendations be ready 24 hours before the

Town Meeting where those articles will be considered and that they be posted at Town Hall, posted on the Town website, and included on the Motion Sheet for that night. The vote was unanimous in favor.

The question came up about how to receive and track the information once it is received. Harry suggested we talk to the Town Manager.

Stephanie moved and Judy seconded, that we notify committees and TM members that we are going to be setting up a mechanism to implement the above resolution (possibly with Kris developing a database to receive recommendations – but this part would not be within the memo that is given to Town Meeting.)

Note: Though the original suggestion was that board recommendations be in writing instead of oral presentations, TMCC does not endorse the idea of restricting Boards ability to speak at TM.

Suggestion 48 (proposal 2; bottom of p. 3- top of p. 4): Carol moved, and Stephanie seconded, that we include the heading or title of each article on the motion sheet rather than just “I move in terms of the motion.” The vote was unanimous in favor.

Suggestion 44, (top of p.3): Carol moved, Judy seconded that we organize precinct meetings town wide and that any additional precinct meetings would be the responsibility of individual precincts. Unanimous in favor.

The remainder of the suggestions will be taken up at the next meeting.

6. Information forum on CPAC and JCPC: Carol reported that she talked to the Assistant Director of the Community Preservation Act Coalition in Boston and she would be willing to come speak at the April 10 panel but needs to clear it with her boss. Judy reported that she and Carol met with Eva Schiffer and learned the history of JCPC.

7. Miscellaneous:

Judy will see about setting up the shelf at the library for discs with information about Town Meeting.

Judy wants to add to the agenda the possibility of inviting the Town Moderator to one of our meetings to talk about how to make TM move more quickly. Carol said she would like to include in such a discussion a discussion of implementing Town Meeting rules such as alternating recognition of speakers with red and green cards during discussion. Peggy pointed out that TMCC had met with the moderator previously. We will discuss

Adjournment: Otto moved to adjourn, Peggy seconded and the vote was unanimous to adjourn at 6:28pm.

Carol Gray, Secretary

Recommendations from the TMCC Subcommittee Dealing with Suggestions 2/08

Note: The recommendations below were agreed upon by all three of us on the subcommittee (Stephanie, Otto & Carol). We have many more suggestions to go through, but this is a start. This memo is divided into suggestions that we thought TMCC could act on (category I), suggestions we thought TMCC should do nothing about since they are not within the scope of what we do (category II), and suggestions to review at some point in the future for possible action (category III). Under each bold heading, the actual wording of suggestions made to TMCC is printed in italics (with the number indicating where that suggestion is on the master suggestion list). Below the suggestion in regular print is what our subcommittee proposes doing about the suggestion.

- I. We recommend that TMCC take action on the following suggestions (with the proposed action discussed after the suggestion in italics).

Topic: Attendance

Should anything be done about poor attendance of individual members? (37)

On this part of suggestion, we do nothing. Can't control people; shouldn't / can't punish them for poor attendance. Concern may be number of absences at critical votes. One remedy could be to have greater publicity about expected dates for particular articles. (e.g., Have the zoning articles schedules to start on a date specific (even if that means we leave early one night or do the zoning articles out of order. This would also save staff money so relevant staff and perhaps town counsel would only have to come on designated days.)) **Proposal:** Do nothing about specific concern about poor attendance, but consider asking SB to set specific dates for the more controversial articles. Problem: There will be even lower attendance on the 'noncontroversial' days.

(Follow-up: Carol will check with Town Clerk to see if there is any policy on attendance.)

What about members who move to another precinct or out of Amherst, or clearly can no longer attend Town Meeting? (37)

Proposal: Include in memo TMCC will distribute summarizing action taken on suggestions something to the effect of: If you notice that someone who was elected to represent your precinct has moved and no longer attends TM, please bring this to the attention of the Town Clerk so that the change in address can be verified and a new election can be held to replace the individual who moved.

Topic: Improvement of Town Meeting Process:

All suggestions to TMCC must be signed. (38)

Proposal: Since under the law, people must be allowed to submit unsigned suggestions if they choose, this suggestion is already being implemented, however the

law should be publicized so people know they may submit unsigned as well as signed suggestions. Include this information in the TMCC memo summarizing action taken on suggestions.

Topic: Education:

Create focus groups to help new members get educated. (39)

Proposal: We treat this suggestion as a call for greater education and address it by having greater publicity (and perhaps a TMCC member calling new members with a special invite) for the precinct meetings, zoning orientation, and warrant review. (If we split up the calls, that would probably be less than 20 calls per person.)

Develop orientation sessions to more reflect the needs of new members. (40)

Proposal: See suggestion above.

Concern is also that we need more input from new members as to what their needs are. Propose that we have an evaluation form after the warrant review, zoning orientation, and precinct meetings (signed or anonymous) asking for input about what was useful or not about that particular session and asking what additional areas people would like training on.

Separate orientation of new members from warrant review. (41)

Concern may be that the warrant review is too long. There is also a concern elsewhere that there are too many meetings. **Propose** we have the new member orientation at a slightly earlier time on the first night of Town Meeting. This has the advantage of not requiring new members to go to another separate meeting, and not having the moderator repeat the same instructions at the warrant review and the first night of town meeting.

Make Warrant Review Meeting more relevant. (42)

Proposal #1: See earlier point about having a questionnaire at the end of the session to find out what was most useful. **Proposal #2:** Ask SB and other committees to have their recommendations (as many as possible) ready by the warrant review. Read those recommendations or have someone from one of those committees make a one minute pitch about that committees position. (Maybe just do this on the really controversial ones?) (Note: I don't think the subcommittee discussed proposal 2. We talked at some length about the idea of getting board recommendations in advance of Town Meeting (see p. __).)

The two venues overlap. Warrant Review a "waste of time". (43)

Proposal 1: As recommended above, do an evaluation form to find out more about what would be helpful to people. **Proposal 2:** Next time, schedule any budget orientation and zoning orientation forums for BEFORE the warrant review so people will be receive the basic process information first, then can ask specific questions about articles at the warrant review.

There should be more meetings in individual precincts so that folks can address issues in their own precincts. (44)

Proposal: Insure that precinct meetings happen. TMCC would play the role of a facilitator of these meetings, e.g., recruiting people to host meetings from different precincts (but not necessarily setting up precinct meetings in every precinct). TMCC would not set up rules for how each precinct would run their meeting, but could provide an information sheet describing how to set up the precinct meeting, a sample flyer or letter hosts of meetings could send out to TM members in their precinct, and other relevant information to the host, etc. TMCC could also advertise the list of precinct meetings widely: include a flyer in the TM packet with a schedule of precinct meetings, post notice online and make sure someone is designated to phone bank people from each precinct before meetings. (Carol volunteered to help with the organization of this and help hosts with phoning if needed). TMCC could also set up a binder that would include all this information to be used by future members of the TMCC so we won't have to reinvent the wheel.

Topic: Preparing the Warrant & Bringing Articles:

Make sure the "Petitioner Guidelines" are given to all potential petitioners. (45)

Proposal: Speak to the Town Clerk to make sure this is happening. Call all petitioners who have pending articles and inform them that there is such a thing as petitioner guidelines. Put the link to these guidelines on the TMCC website.

Make sure that articles from boards and committees (including the Select Board) also follow the guidelines for petitioners (basically to do your homework first). Make sure the solution you seek can not happen through the departments in town govt. (46)

Proposal: Draft a letter to send to the Board Chairs to ask them to circulate petition guidelines to their board members. On a related issue, we propose that we make a list of all information that should go to the Board Chairs in such a letter, such as giving Boards deadlines for providing recommendations to articles (and written background materials?)

Add as many board recommendations as possible to the Motion Sheet, so that all the boards do not have to go up and speak on every issue. (48)

Proposal #1: We ask the person preparing the nightly Motion Sheet to also be willing to receive recommendations from relevant boards and committees to be included on the motion sheet. Boards and Committees would be instructed to email their recommendation to that designated person by a particular time & date, otherwise their recommendation would not be included. The recommendation would be like what the Finance Committee does, i.e., By a vote of 5-2, we recommend in favor of the article.

This would educate TM members more about what issues were likely to be controversial. **Proposal #2:** The motion sheet should state the entire article, not just, "I move in terms of the Motion" which is relatively useless, (or, if it is a zoning article that is quite long, the Planning Board could offer a 1-2 line summary of the substance of the article).

II. We recommend that the TMCC do nothing with the following suggestions:

Topic: *Timing of Town Meeting:*

More frequent meetings: 4-5 sessions/year, allowing the spring Meeting to be purely budgetary. (36)

Suggestion is contrary to the overwhelming majority of input which is to shorten the time commitment spent for town meeting. Concern appears to be that the spring TM takes too long. **Proposal:** Continue to brainstorm ways to make spring TM move more quickly, but disregard the specific request of this suggestion.

Require that TM packets be mailed no later than 3 weeks prior to start of TM; SB recommendation and pro/con arguments for each of the articles should be included. (60)

Already being attempted. Include any updates on this issue in memo for TM.

Evaluate the current policy on number of signatures needed for a petition article. (47)

Propose we do nothing with this suggestion. Concern may be that petition articles are brought to TM with too great frequency and they take up too much time. While increasing the number of signatures might well make petition articles less likely, it undermines one of the goals of TM which is to encourage maximum participation in the governance of the town.

III. We recommend a list be kept for review in the future (perhaps once a year) to consider the viability of longer term ideas:

Possible radio coverage. (57)

Electronic voting could also be on this list.